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# Relative Importance of Attractiveness and Financial Status for Potential Partners

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## *Abstract*

Evolutionary psychology has continually investigated what women are interested in when looking for potential partners. In our study, we were interested in whether men's financial status or attractiveness mattered more in women's perception of their attractiveness and likeliness to date. Four dating profiles were created with differing levels of financial status and attractiveness. Our main hypothesis was that the profile with high financial status and low attractiveness would be rated higher in perceived attractiveness and likeliness to date than the profile with low financial status and high attractiveness, suggesting that financial status is preferred over attractiveness. A secondary hypothesis was that, in accordance with past literature, the profile with high financial status and high attractiveness would be rated the highest in perceived attractiveness and likeliness to date, and the profile with low financial status and low attractiveness would be rated the lowest. We believe that financial status is more important than attractiveness when women select dating partners. Our main hypothesis was not supported, as there was not a significant interaction between financial status and attractiveness in the profiles. Our secondary hypothesis was supported; the profile with high financial status and high attractiveness was rated the highest in perceived attractiveness and likeliness to date, and the profile with low financial status and low attractiveness was rated the lowest.

For many years, evolutionary psychology has investigated what women and men look for in a potential mate. Research has shown that women specifically and universally prefer men with economic resources and the qualities which lead to economic resources: ambition, industriousness, social status, self-confidence, and slightly older age (Buss, 2009). Women also find attractiveness an important quality in potential partners (Singh, 1995). However, there is not a lot of research dealing with the potential relative importance of financial status versus that of attractiveness; it is clear from past research that they are both important, but it is not clear which quality is preferred over the other.

American men who marry in a given year earn about 50% more money than do men the same age who do not marry (Barkow, Cosmides, & Tooby, 1992). This finding suggests a correlation between high financial status and desirability for women. What this correlation does not tell us, however, is whether or not attractiveness is a factor, as it could be a confounding variable. Thus, we are left with the question of whether financial status is more important than attractiveness when selecting mates. Evolutionary psychology offers more insight into the question of relative importance of financial status versus attractiveness. A content analysis of 800 advertisements found that the three qualities women most often sought in men were sincerity, age, and financial security (Barkow, Cosmides, & Tooby, 1992). Physical attractiveness was not in the top three traits, thus suggesting that financial status carries more weight in partner desirability.

Various other studies have found similar results. In one study, conducted by Li, Bailey, Kenrick, & Linsenmeier (2002), women waiting for flights were asked to participate in a mate selection study. At the top of each mate design page, participants were asked to design their ideal marriage partner. The study found that women value status and resources more than other qualities (Li, Bailey, Kenrick, & Linsenmeier, 2002). Another study, that utilized 328 personal advertisements sampled from a major daily Canadian newspaper, found that women were more likely to seek professional status, employment status, financial status, intelligence, commitment, and emotion over non-physical attributes (Davis, 1990). This suggests that women are more likely to seek out men with financial status over attractiveness, because they prefer non-physical attributes such as professional status and financial status over physical attributes, such as attractiveness.

Few studies have been conducted using photographs to judge attractiveness, and those that have been conducted using facial photographs

or full-body pictures found that women use both attractiveness and financial status to judge a man's desirability (Singh, 1995). As predicted, Singh found that the photos with high attractiveness and high financial status were rated as more desirable for all degrees of relationships. However, status and attractiveness were not found to be equally important when only one of these traits was present in high levels. If a man was low in attractiveness but held a high financial status, women still found them more desirable than men with low financial status and high attractiveness. This suggests that financial status is more important than attractiveness.

Because so few studies have been conducted using facial photographs as means of judging attractiveness versus financial status, our study will add to these findings. Online dating profiles are becoming more popular to find potential mates, and therefore have the potential to aid research based on the relative importance of attractiveness versus financial status. In our study, we created fake dating profiles using a two-factor research design, using an attractive and unattractive man with both high and low financial status followed by three questions.

Our main hypothesis is that financial status is more important than attractiveness for women when considering potential partners. Thus, the profile with high financial status and low attractiveness (profile 3) would be rated higher in likeliness to date and perceived attractiveness than the profile with low financial status and high attractiveness (profile 2). Additionally, based on previous research, we predicted that the profile with high attractiveness and high financial status (profile 1) would be rated highest in likeliness to date and perceived attractiveness, whereas the profile with low attractiveness and low financial status (profile 4) would be rated lowest in likeliness to date and perceived attractiveness. This would suggest that women prefer high financial status and high attractiveness over low attractiveness and low financial status.

## **Method**

### *Participants*

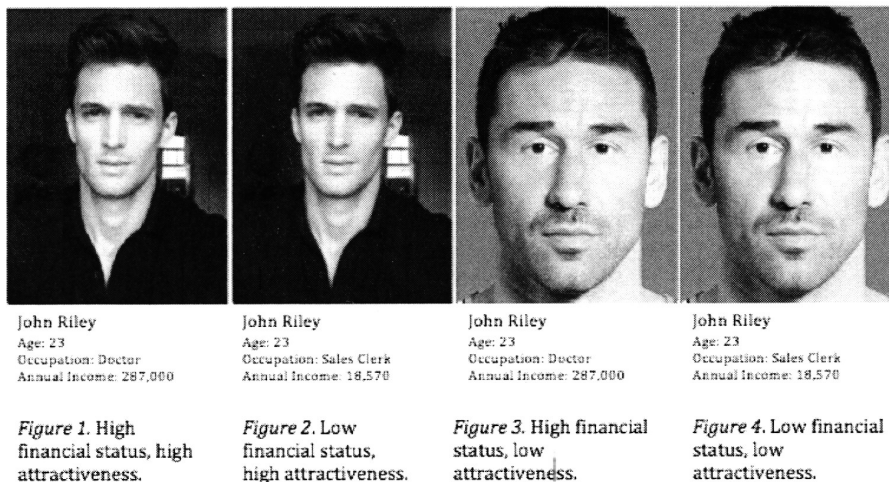
Forty-eight people participated in our study. The participants were selected from the Psychology Department participant pool at Augsburg College. All of the participants were college aged, and self-identified as female. The average age of all 48 participants was 19.02 years of age. The races of our participants were as follows: 41.67% were Caucasian/White, 22.92% were



Latino/Hispanic, 18.75% were African American/Black, 12.50% were Asian, and 4.17% were multi-racial.

## Materials

*Profiles:* The materials in this study included a Google form survey, formatted to look like an online dating profile. There were four different dating profiles, and each participant only viewed one of the four profiles; therefore, 12 participants viewed each individual dating profile. All of the dating profiles showed the picture, followed by a pseudo name (John Riley), age (23), hometown (Minneapolis), occupation (doctor for the high financial status, sales clerk for the low financial status), and annual income (\$287,000 for the high financial status, \$18,570 for the low financial status). Profile one was an attractive man with high financial status (Figure 1), profile two was an attractive man with low financial status (Figure 2), profile three was an unattractive man with high financial status (Figure 3), and profile four was an unattractive man with low financial status (Figure 4). The pictures of the attractive and unattractive men were the same in both the high and low financial status profiles. Below the picture and information was a series of five questions which the participant was asked to answer.



*Questionnaire:* The first question asked the participant how likely they would be to date this man on a scale from 1 (never date) to 10 (for sure would date). The second question asked how attractive on a scale from 1 (not attractive at all) to 10 (very attractive) they found the man. The third question asked how important income is when considering a potential dating partner on a scale from 1 (not at all important) to 10 (very important). The third question did not

relate to the hypotheses, and was meant for descriptive purposes. The last two questions asked the age and ethnicity of the participants. The dating profiles were displayed on a laptop provided by the experimenters. Each participant was randomly assigned to one of the four dating profiles, and only viewed the dating profile they were assigned to.

### *Procedure*

Participants were called into a private room by the experimenter. The experimenter went over the consent form with the participant, and made sure they signed the form before completing the study. Next, the experimenter explained that the participant would be viewing a dating profile, and that they should answer all questions following the profile that they are comfortable with answering. The experimenter then left the room to let the participant view the dating profile and answer the questions. Once the participant finished, the experimenter re-entered the room, informed the participant that they could contact the experimenter with any follow up questions, and thanked them for completing the study. The participant was rewarded one credit, regardless of whether or not they completed the study, for their PSY 105 or PSY 215 research requirements.

All participants were randomly assigned to one of the four profiles. One experimenter had all of their participants view profile one, one of the experimenters had all of their participants view profile two, and so on. The research design used in this study is a 2 x 2 between subjects factorial design; this means that each participant viewed only one of the four profiles.

## **Results**

When looking at the results of the “likeliness to date” question, a significant difference was found between high and low attractiveness in likeliness to date  $F(1,44)=4.83$ ,  $p=.033$  ( $F$  is the variation between the profile means,  $p$  is the probability that the data was due to chance). Participants were more likely to date the attractive man than the unattractive man. There was also a significant difference between high and low financial status in likeliness to date  $F(1,44)=16.2$ ,  $p=.000$ . Participants were more likely to date the men in the profiles with high financial status than those in the profiles with low financial status. The interaction between attractiveness and financial status when considering likeliness to date was not significant  $F(1,44)=2.15$ ,  $p=.150$ . Participants did not show a significant preference between attractiveness and financial status in likeliness to date. See Table A for reported means.

**Table A**

Mean scores for Likelihood to Date (1-10)

		Financial Status		
		High	Low	Total
Attractive- ness	High	7.33 (1.97)	5.58 (2.91)	6.46 (2.59)
	Low	6.83 (2.08)	3.08 (2.39)	4.96 (2.91)
	Total	7.08 (1.99)	4.33 (2.90)	

Numbers are on a scale from 1 (not likely to date) to 10 (likely to date).

\*Note: Standard deviations appear in parenthesis

When looking at the results of the “perceived attractiveness” question, there was a significant difference between high and low attractiveness in perceived attractiveness  $F(1,44)=19.07, p=.000$ . Participants were more likely to perceive the men in profiles containing the attractive man as attractive than those in profiles containing the unattractive man. There was also a significant difference between high and low financial status in perceived attractiveness  $F(1,44)=10.53, p=.002$ . Participants were more likely to perceive the men in profiles with high financial status as attractive than the men in profiles with low financial status. There was no significant interaction between attractiveness and financial status when considering perceived attractiveness  $F(1,44)=.763, p=.387$ . Participants did not show any preference between attractiveness and financial status in perceived attractiveness. See Table B for reported means.

**Table B**

Mean scores for Perceived Attractiveness

		Financial Status		
		High	Low	Total
Attractive- ness	High	8.75 (1.76)	7.17 (2.72)	7.96 (2.39)
	Low	6.41 (2.43)	3.67 (2.23)	5.04 (2.68)
	Total	7.58 (2.39)	5.42 (3.02)	

Numbers are on a scale from 1 (not attractive) to 10 (attractive).

\*Note: Standard deviations appear in parenthesis

When looking at the results of the “importance of income” question, There was not a significant difference found between high and low attractiveness on perceived importance of income,  $F(1,44)=.000$ ,  $p=.1.00$ . Participants viewing attractive men and participants viewing unattractive men rated importance of income similarly. Neither was there a significant difference found between high and low financial status on perceived importance of income  $F(1,44)=.326$ ,  $p=.571$ . Participants viewing profiles with high and low financial status rated importance of income similarly. There were no significant interactions between attractiveness and financial status when considering perceived importance of income  $F(1,44)=1.65$ ,  $p=.205$ . Participants did not show any preferences between attractiveness and financial status in perceived importance of income. This question did not relate directly to the hypothesis, but was created to see if the perceived importance of income depended on the level of attractiveness and/or level of financial status. See Table C for reported means.

**Table C**  
Mean scores for Perceived Importance of Income

		Financial Status		
Attractive- ness		High	Low	Total
	High	5.50 (1.93)	5.92 (2.68)	5.71 (2.29)
	Low	6.25 (1.71)	5.17 (1.59)	5.71 (1.71)
	Total	5.88 (1.83)	5.54 (2.19)	

Numbers are on a scale from 1 (not important) to 10 (important).

\*Note: Standard deviations appear in parenthesis

## Discussion

One part of our hypothesis was that the dating profile indicating high financial status and high attractiveness would be rated the highest in both perceived attractiveness and likeliness to date, and the profile with low financial status and low attractiveness would be rated the lowest in both perceived attractiveness and likeliness to date. Our results supported this portion of the hypothesis; participants rated the profile with high financial status and high attractiveness highest both questions, and rated the profile with low financial status and low attractiveness lowest. This suggests that participants universally prefer men that are attractive and have high financial status over men that are

unattractive with low financial status. This finding therefore supports past research that suggests women prefer men with economic resources (Buss, 2009), who are attractive (Singh, 1995).

Another part of our hypothesis was that the profile with high financial status and low attractiveness would be rated higher in both likeliness to date and perceived attractiveness than the profile with low financial status and high attractiveness. High financial status, we thought, would be desired even though the man with high financial status was unattractive compared to the man with low financial status. In other words, we hypothesized that participants would prefer high financial status over attractiveness when selecting a potential dating partner. Our results did not support our hypothesis; there were no significant interactions between financial status and attractiveness across any of the three questions. This study did not find any difference between high financial status and attractiveness when selecting a mate. Our study failed to support past research, which suggested that women prefer financial status over attractiveness when selecting a partner (Cosmides & Tooby, 1992).

We may have not received the results we expected due to a few different factors. The mean of the profile with high financial status and low attractiveness for likeliness to date (6.83) was higher than the mean for the profile with low financial status and high attractiveness (5.58). The results were headed in the right direction, and thus close to supporting our hypothesis that financial status is more important than attractiveness. One of the factors that may have hindered our study from supporting the hypothesis was the sexual orientation of our participants. We limited the participants to females, but did not limit participants to those attracted to men. Had there been participants not attracted to men, they would not have considered any of the profiles to be desirable, therefore skewing the results. Additionally, our results may have been different if we had more participants. We only had 48 participants, with only 12 participants viewing each profile. It is likely that our study would have yielded a significant difference if there were more participants in each profile; the more participants there are in a study, the higher the power of the study to detect a significant difference in the data.

For future research, it might help to have a better way to clearly define high and low financial status on the dating profiles. In our study, the pictures (depicting attractiveness) were large, whereas the font depicting the financial status was small. The participants may have not have noticed the financial status as much as they noticed the attractiveness. More research should be done on the comparison of relative importance of financial status and attractiveness

when considering dating partners in the area of online dating profiles. Online dating is relatively new, and more people are finding their partners online. Thus, it is necessary to conduct more studies on online profiles to judge the importance of attractiveness versus financial status.

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